

RABIES

What is rabies?

Rabies is a disease of the nervous system caused by a virus. It usually results from an exposure to an animal with rabies. Rabies in humans is fatal almost 100% of the time.

Who gets rabies?

Although rabies among humans is rare in the United States, anyone can get rabies after an exposure to a rabid animal. Rabies is spread when the virus in an animal's saliva, or other infectious body fluid, enters a person's open cuts, wounds, mouth, or eyes. The chance rabies will occur depends on the type of contact or "exposure."

What is an exposure to rabies?

There are two types of exposure (bite and nonbite). A bite is any puncture of the skin by teeth. A nonbite exposure occurs when saliva, brain tissue, or spinal fluid from an animal with rabies enters any scratch, abrasion, open wound, eyes, or the mouth. Petting a rabid animal is not considered an exposure.

What animals get rabies?

Only mammals are infected with rabies, however, some mammals are more likely to be infected with rabies than others. For example, skunks, raccoons, bats, foxes, coyotes, and bobcats are more likely to be infected. All domestic animals such as dogs, cats, horses, and cattle can be infected. Rodents, (such as squirrels, chipmunks, hamsters, guinea pigs, rats, and mice) rabbits, and hares almost never get rabies and have not been known to cause rabies.

How can you tell if an animal is rabid?

Although some animals with rabies look and act normal, most develop one of two forms of the disease. One form is "furious rabies" in which the infected animal is easily excited or angered. The other is "dumb rabies" in which the infected animal becomes paralyzed (has difficulty moving). Usually animals infected with rabies become irritable, restless, and nervous. The only way to tell if an animal has rabies is to kill it in a humane manner and test its brain for the rabies virus.

How long can animals spread rabies?

Cats and dogs can spread rabies up to ten days before they become ill, and during their illness. The amount of time varies for other animals. For specific recommendations following an exposure, contact your physician or the Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology.

What should you do if you are exposed to a rabid animal?

Immediately wash all bite wounds and scratches thoroughly with soap and water. See a doctor as soon as possible. After an exposure to a proven or suspected rabid animal, rabies shots should be started and should include human rabies immune globulin (HRIG) with the Human Diploid Cell (HDCV) rabies vaccine. For specific advice about receiving treatment contact your local or state health department.

How can rabies be prevented?

Vaccination of dogs and cats against rabies is the best way to reduce human exposure. Avoid contact with wild animals, and do not keep wild animals as pets. Control of stray animals can decrease both animal and human exposures to rabies. Animals which have contact with an animal that might have rabies should be reported to the local animal control agency. Any persons who have contact with an animal that might be rabid should contact the local or state health department.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal doctor or veterinarian.
- Your local health department, listed in your telephone directory
- The Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191

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